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File

Don't Talk to a Martini, Olive May Be Listening

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Psst! There may be a "bug" in your martini.

This is bad news for the cherished institution of the Washington cocktail party; the latest in electronic snooping devices works under gin.

The ultimate weapon was exhibited yesterday before a panel of Senators looking into the shadowy world of the transistorized snoop.

"The olive is the transmitting unit," explained San Francisco private eye Harold K. Lipset. "The toothpick is the antenna."

Actually, there is little chance of biting into the olive because the martini is usually in the hand of the snooper.

The experts who turned out to display their wares at yesterday's hearing of the Senate Subcommittee on Administrative Practices and Procedures proved that they are really a playful sort.

They bugged a rose and a Senator. They showed how a telephone can be tapped in many cunning ways—or even turned into a transmitter that can bug a room half-way around the world.

If Big Brother or even little brother wants to tune in on the neighbors there is a vast array of equipment on the market from a .53 induction coil to a laser device that runs to thousands of dollars.

In his opening statement Subcommittee chairman Edward V. Long (D-Mo.) warned that "in the hands of a competent operator, these insidious devices spell an end to the personal and business privacy of anyone brought into their range."

But nothing was sacred in the Senate Caucus Room yesterday, and even Long's opening statement was bugged. As he spoke, a tiny microphone concealed under a rose petal projected his voice to a con-

cealed tape recorder. Lipset played part of the speech back.

Long, an obliging straight man, also answered a call on a bugged Senate telephone while everyone in the big hearing room listened to both sides of the conversation.

Another electronic caves-dropping expert, Ralph B. Ward, vice president of Mosler Research Products, Inc., came to the hearing room with a glossy catalog displaying the firm's snooping wares, a set of earphones and a smooth line of sales patter.

"This item," he told the committee while holding up a tiny microphone "is cotton-coated so it can easily be dyed with Tintex to match the interior of a room."

Long's subcommittee is particularly concerned with the growing use of snooping devices by Federal agencies. One sales agent for an electronic cavesdropping manufacturer, Geoffrey Oberdick Sr., of the Fargo Co., submitted a list of nine Federal agencies, including the United States Information Agency, that bought his equipment.

A USIA spokesman said the agency needed snooping devices to test the efficacy of countersnooping devices. "We're a sensitive agency, you know," he said.

One of the private experts who testified yesterday, Emanuel Mittleman of New York, was asked whether he would sell to anyone who wanted to buy his equipment.

"If I believed it would be for a truly nefarious purpose," answered Mittleman, "I'd think twice before selling it."